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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [MASS](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: YEMEN: WILD, BUT STILL NOT WET

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¶1. SUMMARY. A water-scarcity crisis continues to loom over Yemen. Both urban and rural areas remain at risk from water scarcity, water contamination and untreated waste water, and a mismanaged water policy is generally to blame. Yet, recent increased coordination between the ROYG and donor community as well as private sector interest in investment indicate that the ROYG is taking small steps toward recognizing the issue of water scarcity. END SUMMARY.

NOT A DROP TO DRINK?

¶2. As the demand for water outstrips renewable resources, a water-scarcity crisis continues to loom over Yemen (reftel). In a February 2009 World Bank study, Yemen was identified as having one of the lowest rates of per capita freshwater in the world (135 cubic meters per year), about 10 percent of the world average (1250 cubic meters). The World Bank estimates a water deficiency of one billion cubic meters in Yemen, which is 100 percent of renewable resources. Water scarcity is also a major issue in rural areas, where at least 75 percent of the Yemeni population lives. Fuad Dhaif Allah, Chairman of the National Water and Sanitation Authority (NWSA), told EconOff on March 30 that Amran, Dhamar, Ibb, Saada, and Taiz are areas particularly at risk.

¶3. Across the 17 water basins in Yemen, the extent of water scarcity varies greatly. In Ibb and Taiz, water levels have been drawn down to 500 meters, in contrast to Sanaa (1000 meters). Estimates on when the water will run out vary, but point to a future crisis. The German Organization for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) currently predicts that shortages will become increasingly severe over the next 20 years. Salem Hassan Bashuaib, Chairman of the National Water Resources Authority (NWRA) told EconOff on March 29 that shallow aquifers used around Sanaa 20 years ago are now dry. (Comment: In Sanaa, well water is drawn from depths up to 1000 meters. After 200-300 meters, diesel pumps are required, an additional drain on declining oil resources. End Comment.)

¶4. Clean water is also difficult to come by, and waste water is often left untreated. According to Fuad Allah, water contamination is widespread. The World Bank reports that 56 percent of the population in urban areas has access to safe water and 31 percent to sewage disposal and treatment. In rural areas, 45 percent of the population has access to safe water, and only 21 percent has access to adequate sanitation. Modern water and sewage treatment plants are few in number and have only recently begun operating in Sanaa. Although more such facilities are being built, coverage remains inadequate. Lack of clean water and sanitation has led to high levels of illness. According to an unpublished 2005 report from Parliament, 75 percent of the population is threatened by water-borne diseases.

COMPETING CURRENTS CONTROL WATER POLICY

¶15. Although the Ministry of Water and Environment serves as the umbrella organization, water policy is made and managed through a number of smaller bodies, including the NWRA, NWASA, and the General Authority for Rural Water Supply Projects. Water management is divided into rural and urban areas, which, according to Fuad Allah, do not communicate effectively. Management of supply and demand is sporadic and incomplete. Sanaa's water supply, for example, continues to be depleted due to illegal wells. Ever-increasing water demand has led to the unsuccessful rationing of supply in some rural areas. According to GTZ, about 90 percent of water resources are used in agriculture. (Note: Forty percent of agricultural activity goes into the production of the narcotic drug qat. End Note.)

WILL IT ALL COME OUT IN THE WASH?

¶16. While the ROYG has not yet implemented a comprehensive policy to approach the issue of water scarcity, Ali Mohammed Al-Suremi, Chairman of the General Authority for Rural Water Supply Projects, told EconOff on March 9 that the ROYG is updating its National Water Sector Strategy and Investment Plan (NWSSIP) for addressing water scarcity. This plan will help the ROYG identify core partners and coordinate sectors. Additionally, the Water Sector Support Program (WSSP), a World Bank-led effort, is bringing together members of the donor community who are working on water scarcity issues.

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Led by the Germans and the Dutch, donor efforts attempt to harmonize donor community contributions (80 percent) with ROYG funding (20 percent).

¶17. Private sector assistance may provide innovative, if partial, solutions to the impending water scarcity crisis. Representatives from U.S. company Air2Water told EconOff on April 22 that an intended atmospheric water generation plant in Manakha could produce one million gallons of pure water per day from moisture in the air. (Comment: Because of the relative expense of the initiative and the fact that it produces only drinking water, Air2water is unlikely to make an impact on water supply. End Comment.) Other plans include water desalination in coastal areas and water harvesting through dams in the wadis (water-filled valleys). An additional plan involves pumping water from tribal areas in Marib from an untapped aquifer. These plans, however, are only partial solutions. Desalination is costly, and pumping water across the mountains would not be cost-effective. Water harvesting works only in mountainous regions and outside periods of drought. Pumping water from tribal regions would also require the compliance of the tribes, who have a tenuous relationship with the central government.

COMMENT

¶18. Water is a cross-cutting issue that has political, economic, and social implications. In Yemen, water scarcity contributes to instability. In urban areas, the restricted availability of clean water has created divisions between the rich and the poor, while in rural areas, water rationing has been connected to riots and tribal conflict as recently as March 2009. New efforts on the part of the ROYG and the donor community to centralize and coordinate water policy offer hope that the water-scarcity crisis will be addressed before remaining resources are exhausted. Ultimately, Yemen needs a ROYG-led, comprehensive, long-term solution to the issue of water scarcity. END COMMENT.

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